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PROJECT ABSTRACT

The purpose of the project, "Keys to Access -- Creating Inclusive Systems," was to identify and synthesize the causal factors in the decline of Pacific/Asian participation in Older Americans Act programs.

The project's primary goal was to ultimately improve minority participation in aging prgrams. To accomplish this herculean goal, the Center proposed obtaining information regarding the problem of reduction in the number of older Pacific/Asian participants and to develop strategies for resolving the problem. The project extended over a 15-month period.

Utilizing a methodology conceived as a business management tool, focus groups, the Center was able to document the reasons for low-participant levels in Older Americans Act programs by Pacific/Asians. New immigrant and refugee populations were targeted for the three sites selected across the country. These groups represent high-risk vulnerable populations.

Many of the obstacles identified through the project were those which have traditionally been forwarded: language, lack of knowledge and information, fear, isolation, and unfamiliarity with the service systems. However, subtleties, such as non-recognition of community leadership status, lack of understanding of protocol and ritual, lack of knowledge of old world political biases, and the misinterpretation of verbal responses were de facto obstacles to participation.

Moreover, the de facto obstacles played a more important role in minimizing participation. The interjection of a technical expert into the process validated the important role of such obstacles. The Center found that in its role as the mediator, it was able to create the necessary interface between the service system and the indigenous Pacific/Asian groups. This was demonstrated in two sites in very definitive terms in that two new program strategies were initiated.

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